

Legacy's Harmony In-Wall Loudspeaker

HOME Theater

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Review Reprint



**Hang it up,
freestanding
box speakers.
You've finally
met your match.**



**As reviewed by
Darryl Wilkinson**



Legacy Harmony In-Wall Speaker System

Hang it up, freestanding box speakers.

You've finally met your match.

by Darryl Wilkinson

In-wall speakers don't get any respect. Even at a show like the Custom Electronic Design & Installation Association (CEDIA) convention, where you couldn't chuck a universal remote 10 feet without hitting an in-wall-speaker display, the in-wall-speaker talk always includes the self-deprecating sentence, "They sound pretty good, for in-wall speakers."

The fact is, it's tough to be an in-wall speaker. Due to the various home-construction and décor constraints, most people mount in-walls in locations that would destroy the sonic benefits of even the most superior freestanding loudspeaker. Then there's the fact that the majority of in-wall speakers use your home's walls as their speaker cabinets. Now, I admit that I haven't seen every speaker ever made, but I doubt that there's a serious speaker manufacturer today that crafts high-performance speaker cabinets out of two-by-fours and drywall. Placing tweeters and midrange

drivers in a baffle that's 8 feet wide or more also doesn't figure high on most speaker engineers' to-do lists.

When you consider all of the disadvantages that the in-wall speaker has to overcome, it would appear that, to find an in-wall that sounds great—without the “for an in-wall” qualification—you'd have to travel to the realm of unicorns and magic fairy dust. Most people assume that, if you want to avoid cluttered floor space and visible speaker wires, you have to slaughter sound quality on the altar of domestic décor. In-wall speakers serve the gods of utility, not the muses. Since “sloppy chic” is my décor of choice (OK, just “sloppy”), I have few visual issues with speakers. However, my two-year-old (very curious about anything at floor level) and a Roomba robot vacuum cleaner (not curious at all but generally intolerant of speaker wire) keep me on the lookout for high-performance speakers that can hang on the walls and still hang with the big boys of the speaker world.

Weighing in at 54 pounds and taking up over 660 square inches of wall space (40.75 inches tall by 16.25 wide), Legacy's Harmony in-wall speaker is certainly a big boy. Although the horizontally oriented Harmony Center is slightly smaller than the Harmony

at 12.25 inches tall by 37.5 wide, it's still a giant in the center-channel arena, in-wall or not. Yet size isn't the only area in which Legacy ignores commonly held beliefs about in-walls.

Most in-wall speakers, for example, are designed to be mounted flush with the wall. The Harmony speakers ignore this dictum and protrude approximately 2 inches into the room. You might think

it would be a bit unsightly to place such large, thick structures on the wall. Had Legacy's design-

ers followed the trend in in-walls (white trim surrounding a white metal grille), that most certainly would be the word for it. However, Legacy chose to make use of their extensive expertise with furniture-grade cabinetry (their freestanding loudspeakers feature some of the finest wood finishes around) to create an absolutely gorgeous wood trim and front face (available in a variety of wood finishes). I think the wood finish looks so good, it's almost criminal to cover up 90 percent of the speaker's face with traditional black grille cloth, but I also think the speakers look darn good with the grilles on.

The grilles cover another unconventional aspect of the Harmony in-walls: large drivers. In the Harmony, you'll find a 1-inch silk, neodymium tweeter mounted between and just above an angled pair of 5.25-inch Kevlite-Ti midrange drivers. Bolted above the tweeter/midrange assembly is a



A. The Harmony's driver array sits in a completely sealed, 6-inch-deep cabinet.

B. The Harmony Center is much larger than your average freestanding center speaker.

C. The Point One is a wonderful mate for the Harmony speakers, both sonically and aesthetically.



HIGHLIGHTS

- Incredible dynamics
- Exquisite craftsmanship
- Utterly amazing sonic performance



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D. To install the Harmony, align the indentations on the speaker's backside with the mounting blocks and slide the in-wall into the opening. It's so easy, even Darryl can do it.

E. The Harmony's placement is somewhat limited by the location of your wall's two-by-fours.

huge 12-inch carbon-filled, pulp diaphragm woofer. At the bottom of the speaker is a 12-inch passive radiator. To put things in perspective, each of those 12-inch drivers is larger than many complete in-wall speakers. The Harmony Center uses the same tweeter/midrange assembly flanked by a pair of 8-inch woofers.

To get the most out of this driver arrangement, Legacy mounts it in a completely sealed cabinet that sinks 4 inches into

on sound quality. An additional consideration that you might not think about is the reduction in the amount of sound that bleeds through into whatever room happens to be on the other side of the wall the speaker is mounted in. To further cut down on wall resonance, the Harmony speakers utilize a unique mounting system that's equally viable in a new construction or an existing home and is quite easy to install.

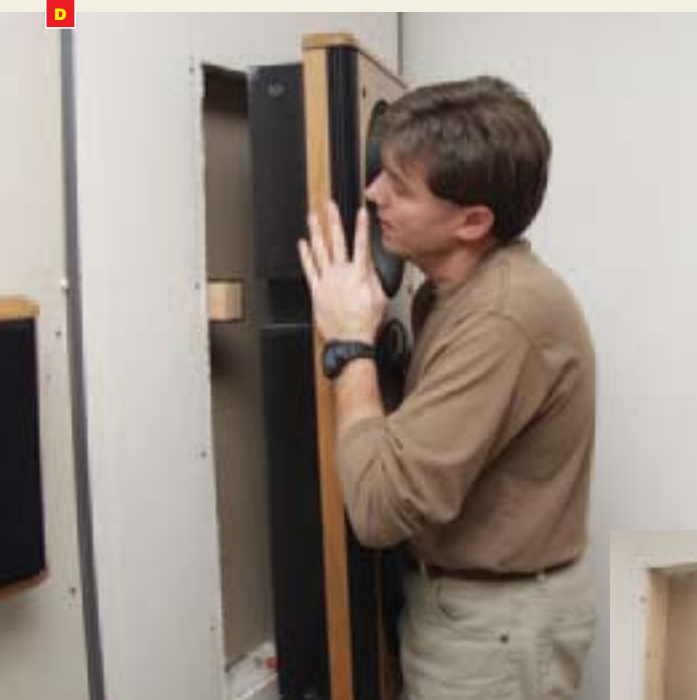
After cutting the correct-sized opening in the drywall between studs mounted on 16-inch centers, you screw a rubber-coated mounting block to each stud. (Legacy includes spacers to compensate for slight variations in stud separation.) Indentations in the backs of the Harmony and Harmony Center cabinets allow the speakers to slide over and rest on the mounting blocks. There are two holes on the front of the speakers with rubber grommets that line up with the mounting blocks. A single screw on each side holds the speaker

snugly against the mounting blocks and the wall itself. The rubber grommets and the rubber coating on the mounting blocks help to minimize the transfer of vibrations from the speaker cabinet to the wall.

The system that Legacy sent for review consisted of two pairs of Harmony in-walls for the front and surround speakers and a Harmony Center. They also sent a freestanding Point One powered subwoofer, which has a 15-inch dual-coil aluminum driver, a 750-watt amp, and a beautiful matching wood finish. From the very beginning,



Photography by Legacy Audio, Kim Tarka, and Darryl Wilkinson



F. A close-up view of the rubber-coated mounting block.

G. The rubber coating and the rubber grommets cut down on the transfer of vibrations from the speaker to the wall.

the wall. For those of you who don't have the necessary wall depth, Legacy makes a matching wood-frame box that mounts on the wall and holds the speaker. This expensive design's most important benefit is precise control over driver performance. It also minimizes acoustic energy inside the walls, which prevents the drywall from resonating and wards off any deleterious effect





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H. Two screws hold the entire Harmony assembly against the wall.



I. and J. Unlike a conventional in-wall that mounts flush with the wall, the Harmony's gorgeous cabinet protrudes 2 inches into the room, while its back-side sinks 4 inches into the wall.

I, on the other hand, stared fear in the face when I switched to movies. I made the stupid mistake of beginning (after midnight with no one else at home) with the scene from *The Others* in which Nicole Kidman's character hears furniture moving around upstairs. Now, I've seen the movie before, and this scene in particular many

times, so I knew what was coming. Still, the Harmony speakers' dynamic ability is so good that I nearly soiled the couch as the rumbles and voices loudly moved from the back to the front of the room. Just to shake the jitters, I checked out the opening scene of *The Red Violin*. The Legacy system reproduced all of the softness and subtlety of the birds, the violins, the bubbling pot, and the fire just as effortlessly as the full orchestration later in the movie.

This system treats all of the audible elements that need to come together in a good movie—the music, the dialogue, and the effects—with immense care and precision to greatly enhance the impact of any movie that's been carefully crafted for sound. The Harmony system is so clean, natural, and open, the only thing better would be the ability to run the Dolby Digital or DTS bit-stream directly into your brain.

Legacy recommends that you mount the Harmony speakers on the wall about 30 inches above the floor with a 6-inch vertical leeway. In my listening room, on several recordings (especially Robert Lucas' *Layaway* CD), I felt that the image was just a tad high—about 6 inches too high, in fact. A benefit of the Harmony speakers' enclosed design, though, is that you can test-drive the speakers at various heights before you or your installer cuts a hole in the wall. (Horizontal placement, on the other hand, is limited by the location of the two-by-fours in your wall.) The

system's bass response without the Point One subwoofer is very good, much better than what you'll get from virtually any other

in-wall and totally lacking in the overemphasized midbass you

usually hear. That being said, however, you'll still want (as you would with most floorstanding speakers) a separate subwoofer. The Point One is striking, both in looks and performance, and it blended with the Harmony in-walls so seamlessly that I'd have a hard time suggesting an alternate.

Without a doubt, Legacy's Harmony speakers are the finest in-walls I've ever heard, and they're some of the most beautiful, as well. Of course, they're not inexpensive, but they'll give any conventional, freestanding speakers

in the same price range a serious run for their money. Listening to



Harmony In-Wall Speaker	\$3,000/pair
Harmony Center Speaker	\$1,700
Point One Subwoofer	\$2,400

Legacy Audio
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the Harmony ensemble will forever change your perception of what in-wall speakers can—and should—be. In fact, after hearing the Harmony speakers, the next time you listen to a pair of freestanding speakers, you might be tempted to say, "Not bad, for a freestanding speaker." 🎧

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